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Editor's Introduction

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JOURNAL OF RESPONSE TO WRITING

Editor's Introduction

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This issue completes the second volume year of JRW. It is hard to believe how quickly the two years have gone by, and we are gratified with the excellent work that authors have shared with us and with the positive response from readers.

This issue has five papers—two research articles, two teaching articles, and a book review—which notably discuss response topics from a broad range of pedagogical contexts. With the publication of Magda Tigchelaar's article, "The Impact of Peer Review on Writing Development in French as a Foreign Language," we are happy to extend our discussions of response to writing to the teaching of languages other than English. Comparing the effects of peer review and self-review over a semester, Tigchelaar found that student writers were more likely to attend to/apply suggestions from their own self-reviews than they were to incorporate suggestions from their peers. She also found that peers were more likely to emphasize global concerns such as organization, and self-reviewers were more interested in fine-tuning at the sentence level and across sentences (cohesion). In particular, the study argues for a meaningful and increased role for guided self-feedback in writing instruction: "Learning how to review one's own texts may require more time and training, but this initial investment may

plant the seeds for more effective development of autonomous writers.”

The second piece, “EFL College Students’ Attitudes and Experiences Toward Teacher-student Writing Conferences,” by Chun-Chun Yeh, explores a teaching technique popular in composition instruction in the U.S. as it is applied in a different context, college-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes in Taiwan. Yeh notes that writing conferences are popular with teachers because they provide a more immediate and satisfying interaction with students around their writing than one-way written commentary affords. However, concerns have been raised as to whether L2 students, with their differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds, will respond positively to these one-to-one interactions. In particular, L2 writing researchers have problematized the common advice given in the U.S.-focused writing center and conferencing literature for teachers or tutors to be non-directive and allow students to set the agenda for the interaction.

Yeh studied 34 college-level EFL students in two English classes in Taiwan and their teachers, who conducted between 4-6 individual conferences with each student over the course of a semester. Conferences were held in instructors’ offices and conducted in the students’ first language, Mandarin Chinese. Students’ attitudes and reactions to the conferences with their teachers were assessed via questionnaires and retrospective interviews. Interestingly, some first-year students were initially confused about the purpose of the conferences, erroneously assuming that it was some sort of oral test they had to pass. This suggests that it is important for instructors not to assume that their students will automatically understand the purpose of one-to-one writing conferences, especially if such interactions have not been part of their educational experiences. Students generally preferred that their instructors set the agenda, and those whose teacher was the less directive of the two expressed lower degrees of satisfaction with the conferences. In all, this study shows the range of experiences students may have with in-person writing conferences with their teachers, and these encounters may vary according to both the students’ personalities and expectations and the instructors’ conferencing styles. Do students enjoy and benefit from one-to-one discussions with their teachers about their writing? The answer seems to be “It depends.”

In our third article, Katherine Daily O’Meara writes about “Providing

Sustained Support for Teachers and Students in the L2 Writing Classroom Using Writing Fellow Tutors.” In this paper, she describes a for-credit internship program in which students are trained to provide support, particularly in the area of one-to-one feedback, to L2 writers taking university composition classes. The writing fellows, who included both master’s-level and advanced undergraduate students, were trained by the author, attended the composition class to which they were assigned regularly, and met individually several times with students in the class to provide them with feedback on their writing.

O’Meara explains the details of the program and presents pilot study data from its implementation. She examined student grades, writing fellow reactions, classroom teacher comments, and L1 student writers’ attitudes about the writing fellows program. It was difficult to ascertain whether the writing fellows program actually helped the L2 student writers to perform better in their composition classes—there were many other intervening variables, such as the instructors’ different teaching approaches—but it was clear that the program benefited the tutors a great deal. The composition teachers generally responded well, with some even noting that having classroom tutors who had been trained by an L2 writing specialist (the author) helped fill in some of the gaps of their own professional preparation. Students also felt positively about the experience of working with the writing fellows, though busy schedules (of both the writing students and the tutors) seemed to be a constraint on how well the program could work.

As numbers of L2 students in composition classes increase over a wide range of contexts, it has become important to identify, implement, and evaluate various support models that can complement what the classroom teacher can do and help the student writers get the types of targeted individual assistance that can help them be successful. The model and pilot data presented here by O’Meara not only provide useful details about this support option but also concrete suggestions about how to make it function optimally.

Our final paper, “Compassionate Writing Response: Using Dialogic Feedback to Encourage Student Voice in the First-Year Composition Classroom,” is a teaching article by Tialitha Macklin. In this paper, the author presents a supportive framework for teacher feedback, with the aim

“to undo students’ isolation from the writing process.” Macklin notes that many students, for a variety of reasons, arrive in the college composition course very estranged from writing and with negative and/or fearful reactions to the process of writing. Unsupportive teacher response practices can cause or add to this estrangement, but compassionate response can begin to heal it.

Built upon Marshall Rosenberg’s work on “nonviolent communication” (2003), Compassionate Writing Response (CWR) has four components: observation, feeling, need, and request. Macklin carefully explains and illustrates each component of the framework and reflects on how its application has shaped her own teaching: “The dialogic nature of this pedagogy encourages me to think of students as human beings rather than as writing artifacts that demand response.” This thoughtful and accessible paper should not only be helpful for current teachers to reflect upon their practices but could also be formative for teachers in training as they think about the nature of response and their own approach or stance towards a task that many writing teachers find burdensome and frustrating.

The issue closes with a book review by Noel Bruening, who examines the second edition of the influential edited collection by Bruce and Rafoth, *ESL Writers: A Guide for Writing Center Tutors* (2009). Taken together, the pieces in this issue emphasize the individual, often delicate relationships between responders and writers. We hope that you enjoy it.

References

- Bruce, S. & Rafoth, B. (Eds.) (2009). *ESL writers: A guide for writing center tutors* (2nd Ed.). Boston: Heinemann.
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